

Fisher's Peak

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Grand Opening of Fishers Peak Visitors' Center

Galax, Virginia

July 16, 2005

I am extremely pleased to be here this morning to celebrate with everyone here today the completion of the final phase of the Blue Ridge Music Center project, and I am happy to welcome the many residents of Southwest Virginia, western North Carolina and more distant places who have traveled here today to enjoy the sounds of our region's traditional mountain music and to take part in this occasion marking the completion of the Blue Ridge Music Center complex.

From a cultural perspective, the Blue Ridge Music Center has a unique and important mission, commemorating the place where traditional American music was born. That music has its roots in these Blue Ridge Mountains on the border between Virginia and North Carolina. We stand today at the very center of the region where traditional American music was first heard.

In our mountains we blended the music of the Celtic lands of Scotland and Ireland with harmonies from Europe and Africa, to form something that was truly new and unique.

The music which was born here is at the root of country, bluegrass, rhythm and blues, and other popular music that has spread across our nation and been exported to the world. And now, two centuries after traditional music was first heard in these hills, with the completion of the Blue Ridge Music Center, we are at long last celebrating in a formal way our region's place as the cornerstone of American music. At the same time we are promoting the tourism economy of Southwest Virginia and Western N.C. with a state-of-the art facility here at Fishers Peak.

The Blue Ridge Parkway is one of the premiere scenic and recreation areas in our region, with an annual visitation of more than 2.2 million people. The Parkway is closely associated with the Blue Ridge music tradition. The popularity of the Old Time Galax Fiddlers' Convention, which draws 10,000 musicians and 40,000 attendees each August reflects that tradition. The dozens of annual festivals of smaller size which our communities boast each year reflect it as well.

To celebrate our heritage and to promote modern day tourism, I began working in the 1990's to obtain the federal resources necessary to construct the Blue Ridge Music Center complex at this site adjacent to the Parkway in Carroll

and Grayson Counties.

And now after more than a decade and the expenditure of more than \$13 million the task is complete. Phase I with the amphitheater, access road and visitor parking was completed in 2001. And today we celebrate the completion of the second phase, the construction of the Visitors' Center.

It occupies 17,300 square feet of space and is divided into two major wings. One wing houses a 100-seat auditorium which will allow visitors the opportunity to view educational movies, slide programs and interpretive talks regarding the traditional mountain music theme of the complex and will provide an excellent setting for smaller concerts. In the facility's opposite wing, a 2,500 square foot exhibit gallery is housed. Currently, this space is being used for an outstanding temporary exhibit which was developed by the Blue Ridge Institute at Ferrum College. The exhibit focuses on the lives of several of our region's prominent musicians. Using a \$100,000 federal grant which I obtained from the Appalachian Regional Commission, plans are being developed for a permanent exhibit which will include museum-quality displays. The permanent exhibit will highlight the cultural roots and influences of the mountain music that originated in Southwest Virginia and western North Carolina.

The new Visitors' Center also offers classroom and meeting space to accommodate visiting school groups. An information desk and adjoining music and book sales area have also been located near the entrance of the Visitors' Center to provide tourists with information regarding points of interest in the City of Galax and surrounding Carroll and Grayson Counties.

I am greatly pleased by this success. The Fishers Peak Center, with the recently completed Visitors' Center, will provide an important forum for the preservation and celebration of traditional American music. This Center, one of the venues on the Crooked Road Mountain Music Trail in Virginia and home to the weekly concerts attended each summer by thousands will contribute richly to the growth of tourism in our region.

I will now take a moment to recognize and thank several individuals who have played a large role in our effort to build the Center.

Dan Brown, Superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway, Joe Wilson, Chairman of the National Council for the Traditional Arts and Julia Olin, Executive Director for the NCTA deserve recognition for their leadership in this project. These individuals have been excellent partners in our effort to make the Blue Ridge Music Center a reality, and I thank them for their leadership in this project.

I also want to express my appreciation to Congressman Dave Obey, from Wisconsin, the ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee, whose tireless efforts on our behalf were invaluable to the more than \$13 million in federal funds which we have obtained for the project.

I also want to recognize Mayor C.M. Mitchell and the Members of the City of Galax City Council and Dan Campbell, City Manager, for the City's steadfast support of the project. It should be noted that the City of Galax donated approximately one half of the project site the the Parkway for construction of the complex.

I also want to thank the past and present members of the Boards of Supervisors in both Carroll and Grayson Counties, and their County Administrators, who have strongly supported the project.

And I also want to thank the Members of the Fishers Peak Advisory Committee, a local group which has made valuable suggestions in the planning phase, for their participation.

Finally, I want to thank my recently retired District Administrator, Linda DiYorio, for her persistent and persuasive efforts in aid of the project.. The outstanding success which we celebrate today would not have been possible without her.

During the time it has taken to construct the Blue Ridge Music Center, the people involved in this project never had any doubt that it would succeed. To all who have supported this effort, whose determination has sustained our work, I say thank you and congratulations for what together we have accomplished.